fingernailclams and peaclams

representative specimens

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Mollusca
Class: Bivalvia

Features

Fingernailclams and peaclams have shells that are rounded or slightly oval and “inflated.” Both the anterior and posterior ends are rounded and the umbo (hump) is located near the center of the hinge. The outside of the shell is whitish or cream-colored with very fine concentric ridges covering it. The inside of the shell is white. As the name suggests, these mussels are very small, growing up to only about one-half inch long.

Natural History

Fingernailclams and peaclams are found in lakes and streams of all sizes in silt, mud, sand, or gravel. Their distribution in Iowa is not well documented.
Freshwater mussels have an elaborate reproductive system. During spawning, males release sperm into the water. The sperm are drawn inside the female's shell, where they fertilize eggs in her body. The fertilized eggs develop into larvae (glochidia) and are stored for a time in the female's gills. When the glochidia mature, the female generally expels them into the water where they must attach as parasites to the gills or fins of fish. Larvae remain on the host fish for a period of weeks or months. Young mussels then detach from their host and drop to the bottom of the body of water. Mussels are filter-feeders, bringing in water and the organic matter it contains through the incurrent siphon, filtering the particles out, then sending the rest of the water away from the body through the excurrent siphon. Particles filtered include plankton and detritus. Mature mussels spend most of their lives, which range from 10 to 100 years, partially or wholly buried in the bottom substrate.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.